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Jottings from June: April 18, 2016

I hope that some of the readers of this column had a chance to see some of the video of the installation of Rev. John Dorhauer as the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ. It has been an interesting process to see the installation take place in three cities on three consecutive days—New York on April 15, Chicago on April 16, and Seattle on April 17 to ensure that as many people as possible are able to be a part of this celebration and process. There is a link on our Facebook page at SECUCC.

But even as we celebrate the wonderful diversity-racial, ethnic, geographic, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, theological, mental and physical capacity- of the United Church of Christ, I am reminded that we need to find more ways to live into the Gospel message that is our UCC motto, "that they may all be one." I have seen news reports of two people taken off planes because others were not comfortable with their presence. One was Rev. William Barber, a Disciples of Christ pastor and president of the North Carolina NAACP, who was confronted by another passenger who questioned his need for two seats due to a medical condition. The other was UC Berkeley senior Khairuldeen Makhzoomi who used a common Arabic greeting while talking on his phone. Each incident has its own details which is not my point in this article. Rather that others on each plane felt some need to make their discomfort with the circumstances known.

This comes at a time when we see legislation about religious exemption vetoed by the Governor of Georgia but passed by North Carolina and being considered in South Carolina and Oklahoma and anti-transgender bills passed in Mississippi and introduced in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. Those who know the geographic boundaries of the Southeast Conference will recognize that several of these states are within the geographic bounds of the Conference. And I have had inquiries from pastors and members of our churches in some of these places asking if the UCC or Conference have issued official statements regarding this legislation. While there are not official statements issued at this point, I hope you will look at the article about religious exemption legislation and about voting as a way of practicing justice.

Add all this to the upcoming anniversaries of the Boston Marathon bombing, the shooting at Mother Emmanuel AME in Charleston, and so many other places where violence is seen as the action used to make a statement about discomfort with diversity in culture, society and religion. As we are just a month away from Pentecost Sunday, I am reminded that the power of the Holy Spirit can make us one and give us the gift of understanding one another regardless of where we are situated.

I will be preaching at Church of the Savior in Knoxville on April 24th as we celebrate UCC Pacific Islander Asian American Ministry Sunday. This is a group that has been a part of my life and of the UCC since 1974. What can you think of to do to lift up the diversity of your own personal situation, your church, your community, and the wider world so that we may all know that we are one in the eyes of our creator, regardless of the name by which that Holy Presence is known.

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